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'Permanent Health Risks' for Unborn Babies: EPA Warns About Weedkiller Used on Farms, Golf Courses

Citing "serious, permanent, and irreversible health risks" to pregnant women and their developing babies, the EPA on Monday warned that exposure to dimethyl tetrachloroterephthalate, or DCPA, could lead to low birth weight, impaired brain development, decreased IQ, and impaired motor skills later in life.

By The New Lede

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on Monday took the rare step of issuing a warning about "serious, permanent, and irreversible health risks" associated with a chemical used to kill weeds on farms and golf courses and athletic fields.

Citing "significant health risks to pregnant individuals and their developing babies," the agency said farmworkers and others handling dimethyl tetrachloroterephthalate, more commonly known as DCPA, were at risk, as are people who might play on courses or fields recently sprayed with the pesticide.

The most serious risks extend to the developing babies of pregnant women, especially those handling DCPA products.

The agency said pregnant women exposed to DCPA could experience changes to fetal thyroid hormone levels, which are linked to low birth weight, impaired brain development, decreased IQ, and impaired motor skills later in life.

Though product labels say people should stay out of fields for 12 hours after they are sprayed with DCPA, the EPA said evidence indicates that in many cases, sprayed fields would be unsafe for 25 days or more.

The agency additionally said that mothers and their developing babies could be at risk if they live near areas where DCPA is used because the pesticide can drift.

"EPA has determined that currently registered products containing the herbicide DCPA likely cannot be used under current label directions without posing serious risks of concern in humans," Ed Messina, director of the Office of Pesticide Programs, stated in a letter to AMVAC, a California-based company that is the sole manufacturer of the pesticide.

The product is primarily used to control weeds on crops such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage and onions. Last year, AMVAC agreed to end its use on turf, citing health concerns.

The EPA is currently reviewing whether to reapprove DCPA. Though the agency rarely takes the step of canceling a pesticide, it is considering that route, including suspending DCPA during review process, the agency said.

"Due to the serious potential risks posed by DCPA use, EPA will be pursuing these regulatory options as soon as practicable," Messina wrote in the communication to AMVAC.

AMVAC proposed mitigations, including making DCPA a Restricted Use Pesticide, meaning only certified handlers can use it, removing powder formulations from the market, reducing maximum application rates, prohibiting aerial and hand-held application, increasing buffer zones, and requiring maximum Personal Protective Equipment.

However, the EPA said these do not go far enough and would still pose a risk to people.

"DCPA exposure represents a serious risk to pregnant workers and their children, so it's imperative that we warn people about those risks now," Assistant Administrator for the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention Michal Freedhoff said in a news release.

"We're committed to taking action to protect the health of children, workers, and others who are exposed to DCPA."

Critics noted that the EPA has been pushing AMVAC for more than a decade for scientific evidence of DCPA safety and said it should be banned in the U.S., as it has been in the European Union since 2009.

"The EPA's own conclusions and the overwhelming scientific evidence underscore the ongoing risks of the toxic pesticide DCPA," said Environmental Working Group Senior Toxicologist Alexis Temkin.

"As long as DCPA continues to be legal, the chemical will continue to pose real dangers to farmworkers, people who are pregnant and other vulnerable populations exposed to it."

EWG research has found that up to 200,000 pounds of DCPA has been sprayed during some years in the large farming state of California.

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tag
21 days ago
I'm no expert when it comes to all the chemicals sprayed on farms, flower beds and golf courses. All I know is using my local farm store drive thru to pick up supplies, I have to skip that convenience every spring as it is lined with all these chemical concoctions to the point of making me ill if I drive thru. It is lined with them. People need to ask themselves if this is what we want to leave our children? Our grandchildren?
2 0 Reply

Little O
21 days ago
I have played golf for over 65 years competitively and any woman, especially one that is pregnant, has NO business being anywhere near to a golf course. Same for men hoping to conceive. I hope that when DJT fulfills his recent promise of being "a dictator but only for his first day back in office" that he signs a moratorium of some kind to halt the use of pesticides and other chemicals. SO WHAT if we have to play with a few more bugs and less pretty grass. Only God knows how many golfers have succumbed to illness from those chemicals. I know one very well who got cancer WAY too young because he was not careful in his youth where he put his hands after touch the golf ball. The world renowned psychiatrist from long ago, Dr. M. Scott Peck, who wrote the seminal book "THe Road Less Traveled" that rocked the world and, I heard, outsold the Bible one years, was referred to as "The Conscience of Humanity." He had been a long-time elite amateur tennis player; I heard nationally ranked at one point but injuries crept up and he was told that golf would help him. So he picked up the game and was so enamored that he wrote "Golf and the Spirit" that almost no one knows about.
His seminal framing first words in The Road Less Traveled were "Life is difficult." IN Golf and the Spirit, he framed that book with: "We can all agree that sports are metaphors for life..... Golf is different. Golf is NOT a metaphor for life - GOLF IS life."
Let's get the chemicals off the golf courses so that "life" can flourish and grow and enjoy nature as it is supposed to be enjoyed. "Trust the science and the scientists" has had its day and needs to vanish into the past.
1 0 Reply

Leslie Henderson
20 days ago
Yes harmful to your health, and to your unborn baby, but too bad for you, that's you're fault, we will keep poisoning you with this and other toxic chemicals so our grass is green, you're veggies have absolutely no nutrition left, and our bribery wallets are lined thick! Another farce of a govt acronym that does nothing good/ words alone mean nothing, why don't they fix it!!!!
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